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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 005944

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ELA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS MOVING AHEAD WITH  
CANDIDATE REGISTRATION; HISTORIC OPPOSITION PARTY TO ENTER  
THE RACE

REF: A. CAIRO 5821

[1](#)B. CAIRO 5592

Classified By: A/DCM Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) President Mubarak's July 28 announcement of his plans to run for a fifth 6-year term in Egypt's first-ever multi-candidate presidential election (ref A) was marked by a range of reactions, from full support to outright disappointment, and an anti-Mubarak rally in downtown Cairo on July 30 that was marred by violence (septel). Meanwhile, a number of challengers to Mubarak are registering to run in the September 7 election. In a surprise move late August 1, al-Wafd party leader No'man Gomaa reversed his party's earlier decision to not field a candidate and announced his intention to run, bringing the largest "historic" opposition party into the fray. Most other candidates, with the exception of al-Ghad party leader Ayman Nour, are clearly engaging in symbolic gestures. End summary.

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Reaction from Pundits Runs the Whole Spectrum  
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[1](#)2. (C) Both media commentary and Embassy contacts offered a range of reactions to President Mubarak's July 28 announcement to run for the NDP in the September 7 presidential elections. Although oppositionists and entrenched NDP supporters alike shared the view that Mubarak's decision was no real surprise, many offered passionate and pointed criticism that would never have surfaced in the previous system of presidential referendums:

--Intellectual Amin Al-Mahdy said that Mubarak's decision was expected, but part of an "act" that started with the "farcical" amendment of Article 76 of the Constitution. He said that "Mubarak's undemocratic and corrupt regime would never allow others to reach power. "The NDP is fooling the U.S. into believing that there is ongoing reform and democracy in Egypt while in fact the regime is implementing what it wants and making it look legal and constitutional."

-- Deputy Director of Al-Ahram's Center for Political and Strategic Studies Dr. Mohamed El-Sayyed Said told us that Egyptians never doubted that Mubarak would run again for the presidency. If there was any doubt about another term, El-Sayyed remarked, Mubarak's address to the nation following the Sharm bombings shattered it. In the end, El-Sayyed noted, Mubarak's main reason for running in 2005 was the same one he used throughout the 1990s - to combat terrorism.

-- Hisham Qassem of the opposition Al-Ghad Party said that although Mubarak wanted the people to think that he was preparing his son Gamal for the presidency, "he actually planned from the very beginning to run personally." Qassem added that Mubarak was using all means to leave little room for competitors. Nevertheless, Qassem said the Ghad Party would fight fiercely.

-- Manar Al-Shorbuggy, chair of the American Studies Center at the American University in Cairo, said that while Mubarak's July 28 promise of future constitutional change was welcome, his ideas were more the demands of opposition parties than a unilateral Mubarak initiative. Al-Shorbuggy also observed that Mubarak's proposed constitutional reform was vague. Citing the experience with Article 76, she cautioned that the NDP's view of constitutional reform may differ significantly from general expectations.

-- Hassan Badrawy of the Al-Wafd Party said Mubarak's announcement was expected. Though a Mubarak supporter, he noted with disdain that the Cairo's Gezira Sporting Club allows for lengthier presidential campaigns. "Three weeks is not nearly enough time for candidates to realistically promote themselves or their ideas," he complained. That said, Badrawy said he fully supports Mubarak and his "good intentions toward the country," especially over other "very

weak" candidates or a system based on inheritance. While welcoming the proposed cancellation of the Emergency Law, Badrawy feared that a new anti-terrorism law could be worse, cautioning that the "ring" of advisors surrounding Mubarak "always gives him a wrong picture."

-- Youssef Sidhom, editor-in-chief of the Coptic newspaper al-Watani, said that Mubarak was the best available candidate for the upcoming elections. He viewed the current elections as a chance for possible candidates to prepare themselves for the 2011 elections. Sidhom criticized the Pope's statement supporting the continuity of the Mubarak regime.

-- Emad Siam, member of the Kifaya movement, opposed Mubarak's nomination and stated the Movement was expecting someone else from the NDP to run. He added that Kifaya will keep demonstrating against Mubarak and "we will keep trying to open people's eyes to the Mubarak regime's shortcomings, such as human rights violations, corruption, and economic deterioration."

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Demonstrations Turn Ugly  
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13. (SBU) Mubarak's announcement also precipitated one anti-Mubarak demonstration. On July 30, some 250 protesters held a demonstration in central Cairo, which ended with police violence and arrests (septel).

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Wafd Party Enters the Race  
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14. (SBU) After taking a firm position to not field a candidate, but also to not "boycott" the presidential election, the al-Wafd Party, historically Egypt's most prominent opposition force whose heyday was in the 1930s, dramatically changed course on August 1 with the announcement that septuagenarian party chairman No'man Gomaa would run for president. In a press conference, Gomaa stated that after long deliberations, the Party's Higher Committee decided in a 30-10 vote to field him as a candidate. He emphasized, however, that this was the party's decision, and that he had been one of the members who had opposed his nomination. Gomaa also said that Wafd had decided to move forward with his nomination even though the pre-conditions set by the party had not been met. The party had earlier decided that it would not field a candidate unless the GOE repealed the Emergency Law, made available accurate lists of registered voters, and provided full judicial supervision of the elections. (Comment: Most analysts believed that Wafd had originally decided not to field a candidate because of fears of being embarrassed by low voter support. End comment.)

15. (SBU) Gomaa said that the official campaign period (August 17-September 4) was far too short, even for local council elections. He stated it would be impossible for independent candidates to obtain the required signatures of support from elected members of national and regional legislatures. However, Gomaa said he would do his best to win, despite the difficulty in running against Mubarak. Gomaa stated that the Wafd Party would likely reject government funds (500,000 Egyptian pounds, or about \$86,800) offered to candidates to finance their campaigns, opting instead to use Wafd resources.

16. (SBU) Note: Potential candidates have until August 4 to submit registration materials to the 10-member Presidential Election Commission. The commission will then determine whether candidates qualify under the recently adopted Presidential Elections Law, either as independents or as party nominees. To qualify as an independent, a candidate must obtain 250 signatures from elected members of national and regional legislatures. To qualify as a party nominee, the candidate's party must have been legally recognized and in operation prior to May 2005. End note.

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And Let's Not Forget the Other Candidates  
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17. (SBU) Even as Mubarak kicked off his official campaign, other presidential aspirants were making their decisions on the upcoming election. Three would-be candidates have made public, symbolic withdrawals from the presidential race: Tagammu Party honorary chairman Khalid Mohieldin, prominent reformer Saad Eddin Ibrahim, and feminist author Nawal Saadawi (ref B). Others are in various phases of registering their candidacy by the August 4 deadline. Those who have made known their intention to run in the September 7 election include:

--Wahid al-Oksory, age 52, retired army officer and chairman of the Misr Al-Araby Socialist Party;

--Ahmed el-Sabahi, age 90, former Shura Council member and chairman of the Umma Party;

--Dr. Fawzi Ghazal, age 73, chairman of the Egypt 2000 Party;

--Refaat Al-Agroudy, age 63, chairman of the al-Wefaq al-Qawmy Party;

--Ibrahim Turk, age 47, chairman of the Unionist Democratic Party;

--Dr. Osama Shaltout, former army officer, chairman of the Al-Takamoul Party and appointed member of the Shura Council;

--Helmy Salem, age 62, chairman of the Ahrar Party;

--Mamdouh Qenawy, age 69, chairman of the Social Constitutional Party;

--Ayman Nour, age 40, chairman of the al-Ghad Party.

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Comment  
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18. (C) Comment: Wafd has set sail on what will be a stormy and highly improbable path to victory on election day. But given that most candidates are entering the presidential race entirely for symbolic reasons, Wafd's decision to field Gomaa is welcome. Its abrupt changing of course to nominate its chairman for the presidency and his suggestions that the party will use in-house resources to support his run suggests that Wafd appears to be taking its campaign against Mubarak seriously. Once approved by the Election Commission, Egypt's presidential ballot will be filled with nearly a dozen lightweight candidates and two middleweight contenders (Gomaa and al-Ghad party leader Ayman Nour), all entering a race where the clear favorite, by a long shot, remains President Mubarak. End comment.

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JONES